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The Kennicott Screech Owl

BY J. H. BOWLES

THE Kennicott screech owl (*Scops asio kennicotti*) is a tolerably common resident thruout the year in northwestern Washington. It is seldom found in the higher altitudes or in heavily wooded regions, but is most frequently to be met with in river valleys and in the oak-sprinkled prairie country, usually in the immediate vicinity of water.

Exceedingly sociable in their disposition towards mankind, these birds are frequently seen in the cities, and all the nests I have ever examined were but a very short distance from houses. On one occasion at an evening lawn party in the city, one of these owls spent more than half an hour catching what I am positive were angle-worms. He would swoop down onto the lawn and stay for perhaps a minute, returning each time either to one of a small group of maples or to the roof of the house. It was too dark to distinguish what he was catching, but he paid no more attention to the people walking near him than an occasional turn of the head, busying himself with poking about in the short grass with his bill.

These birds appear to see perfectly well in the day time, tho before dusk most of their time is spent in the thickets of small firs and maples. When come upon suddenly at such times they eye the intruder vigilantly until he approaches within ten or a dozen feet, and then fly swiftly and silently out of sight.

A bird sitting on heavily incubated eggs always appears to be in a kind of torpor when lifted from the nest, and is certainly the sleepest looking and acting creature imaginable. She keeps her eyes shut all the time and may be handled with impunity, never struggling or attempting to get away.

If the eggs are fresh, however, her actions are somewhat different, as may be seen from the following notes taken by my brother, Mr. C. W. Bowles, concerning a nest with four partly incubated eggs.

"One bird was sitting in a tree about one hundred and fifty feet away watching my actions closely, but remained perfectly motionless with the exception of its head. The sitting bird, when taken from the nest and tossed into the air, flew without any hesitation to where her mate was sitting. While flying she snapped her beak repeatedly, but neither bird made any noise afterward."

The high-keyed, tremulous hooting cry of these birds is, strangely enough, most often heard during the fall months. In spring and summer, tho repeatedly spending the night in localities where they were tolerably abundant, I have never heard them utter a note of any description.

During the greater part of the year these owls are entirely beneficial, their food consisting mostly of mice. Large beetles are often added, and nearly every small stream shows signs of where an owl has successfully angled for craw-fish, carefully splitting and picking the meat from the shell. After the eggs are hatched, however, the parents are at their wit's end to procure food enough for the hungry babies, and it is at this season only that birds are used in the bill of fare. The northwestern flicker seems to be found especially delectable, tho feathers of the Steller jay, western robin and a few other species are sometimes found in the hole with the young. Curiously enough it is most unusual to find remains of juncos, sparrows or other small-sized birds; and, all things considered, these owls unquestionably do many times as much good as they do harm.

The location chosen for a nesting site is invariably in a clearing; in one case a fir stub standing alone in a city lot was the somewhat unwise selection. The nest

is almost always in a natural cavity of an oak or fir stub, tho an unusually large hole made by a flicker is sometimes used. It is seldom at any great height from the ground, usually from ten to fifteen feet, and is generally only six or eight inches deep. An exception to this was in an oak stub where the entrance was only four feet up, the bottom of the cavity being but three inches above the level of the ground. No nesting material or lining of any kind is used, the eggs being deposited on the decayed wood at the bottom of the hole.

The eggs are laid from the first to the second week in April, and are from two to four in number, four being most commonly found. They are pure white in color, a globular oval in shape, with a smooth, finely granulated and somewhat glossy shell. In size they seem exceedingly large for the size of the bird, altho this is one of our largest screech owls. An average egg is as large as an average egg of the long-eared owl, tho the latter is, of course, a much larger bird. The largest egg in my collection measures 1.65x1.40 inches, the smallest 1.48x1.27 inches, an average egg measuring 1.59x1.35 inches.

After the young are partly grown it is most unusual to find either parent on the nest, which makes it seem very possible that the old birds spend most of the day hunting for food. This I know to be the case with the horned owls of eastern Washington.

The young are generally quite lively when taken from the nest, and sometimes very much on the defensive. Daylight does not seem to bother them in the least, for they stare at the intruder in a most uncompromising manner.

The nesting cavity and the ground around it are kept scrupulously clean from first to last, and only rarely an occasional tell-tale bit of down at the entrance discloses the secret to the bird student.

In Massachusetts the male screech owl almost invariably has a roosting hole for himself not far from the nest occupied by the female. With our northwestern sub-species it is extremely doubtful if this ever occurs; at least my nine years' experience in Washington have shown no evidence to that effect.

Tacoma, Washington.

Nesting of the Red-bellied Hawk

BY C. S. SHARP

THIS west-central part of San Diego county is especially favored by the presence of the red-bellied hawk (*Buteo lineatus elegans*). The birds are not commonly seen near the coast, but in the interior valleys, where the river bottoms are more or less thickly lined with trees and scattering groves, we find them following the rivers up to about the base of the coast range.

In these localities the species is a fairly common resident, seldom appearing in the higher enclosed valleys or in the mountainous regions, and their hunting range lies along the rivers and the adjoining fields and low-lying hills.

The highest elevation at which I have found them is about 1350 feet, where a pair have for many years inhabited an oak grove on the edge of an open mesa. This is at the head of a steep ravine which runs up for a couple of miles from the river some 900 feet below. Both elevation and location, being so far away from the river bottom, are unusual.

They do not appear to be an open country bird like the red-tail but seem to